

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

TITLE:

FLUID SPRAY APPARATUS

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FLUID SPRAY APPARATUS

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

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This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No.

60/425,835, filed November 12, 2002 by Ronald D. Stouffer.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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21 1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

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This invention relates to fluid handling processes and apparatus. More particularly, this invention relates to new methods and apparatus for distributing the flow of fluid from a spray head.

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27 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

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Spray heads are commercially available in numerous designs and configurations for use in showers, faucets, whirlpools, sprinklers, and industrial processes. For example, in shower applications, one may encounter spray heads being used as either showerheads or body sprays. As a showerhead, the spray is

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1 placed at a height that is front of or slightly higher than a user's head and it, at typical
2 flowrates of 2.0-2.5 gpm, serves as the primary or only means of supplying liquid to
3 the user. As a body spray, one or more rows of such sprays are typically placed in a
4 shower's front or side walls. At typical flowrates of 1.5-2.5 gpm, body sprays
5 typically serve as ancillary sprays which have smaller target areas than showerheads.

6 While many spray heads are designed and sold for their decorative styling,
7 there are a great number of different showerhead mechanisms which are intended to
8 improve or change one or more characteristic of the water spray pattern. Any
9 particular spray pattern may be described by the definable characteristics of the spray
10 pattern, including the volume flow rate of the spray, the spray's area of coverage, the
11 spatial distribution of spray droplets in a plane perpendicular to the direction of flow
12 of the spray, the average spray droplet velocities, the average size of the spray
13 droplets, and the frequency of the spray droplets impacting on an obstacle in the path
14 of the spray. Furthermore, these characteristics may be used to adapt a spray pattern
15 for specific service purposes, including a pulsating jet stream for massaging of
16 muscles, a more uniform soothing spray to provide maximum wetting.

17 Stationary spray heads with fixed jets are the simplest of all spray heads,
18 consisting essentially of a water chamber and one or more jets directed to produce a
19 constant pattern. Stationary spray heads with adjustable jets are typically of a similar
20 construction, except that it is possible to make some adjustment of the jet opening
21 size and/or the number of jets utilized. However, these types of jets provide a straight
22 often piercing directed flow of water.

23 These stationary spray heads cause water to flow through its apertures and
24 contact essentially the same points on a user's body in a repetitive fashion. Therefore,
25 the user feels a stream of water continuously on the same area and, particularly at
26 high pressures or flow rates, the user may sense that the water is drilling into the
27 body, thus diminishing the positive effect derived from such a spray head. In order to
28 reduce this undesirable feeling, various attempts have been made to provide spray
29 heads that vary or enlarge the areas being impacted by the sprays.

30 Examples of such spray heads seeking broader patterns of spray droplet
31 distribution include the showerheads disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. (USPN) 3,691,584

1 (Drew et al.), USPN 4,944,457 (Brewer), USPN 5,577,664 (Heitzman) and USPN
2 6,360,965 (Clearman).

3 USPN 4,944,457 discloses an oscillating spray head that uses an impeller
4 wheel mounted to a gear box assembly which produces an oscillating movement of
5 the nozzle. See FIG. 1.

6 Similarly, USPN 5,577,664 discloses a spray head having a rotary valve
7 member driven by a turbine wheel and gear reducer for cycling the flow rate through
8 the housing between high and low flow rates, causing the spray droplets to be
9 distributed over broader areas. Additionally, the turbine wheels of this spray head
10 may be used to control the frequency of the spray droplets impacting on an obstacle
11 in the path of the spray, thereby using this phenomena to cause the flow from the
12 spray to exhibit pulsating features for massaging purposes. See FIGS. 2A-2B. For an
13 example of another type of massaging shower head, see USPN 5,467,927 (Lee).

14 All of these spray heads require extremely complex mechanical structures in
15 order to accomplish the desired broader distribution of a spray's droplets.
16 Consequently, these mechanisms are prone to failure due to wear on various parts and
17 mineral deposits throughout the structure.

18 USPN 3,691,584 also discloses a spray head that attempts to efficiently
19 distribute its droplets over a wider area. See FIG. 3. It utilizes a nozzle mounted on a
20 stem that rotates and pivots under forces placed on it by water entering through
21 radially disposed slots into a chamber around a stem. Although this spray head is
22 simpler than those of Brewer, Heitzman or Lee, it still includes a large number of
23 piece requiring precise dimensions and numerous connections between pieces.
24 Furthermore, the Drew spray head relies upon small openings for water passageways
25 and is subject to mineral buildup and plugging with particles.

26 USPN 6,360,965 discloses a spray head, see FIG. 4, that distributes its
27 droplets over a wider area by utilizing a means for wobbling the nozzle assembly of
28 such a spray head. FIG. 5 shows the reported typical spatial distribution of spray
29 droplets from such a spray head. Meanwhile, FIG. 6A-6D which are reproduced from
30 USPN 6,360,964 are reportedly graphical representations of the uniformity of the
31 spray patterns from four shower heads, including three commercially available

1 shower heads and a shower head made in accordance with FIG. 5. The droplets were
2 collected at a specified distance from the spray head in a row of glass tubes. The
3 graphs represent a side view of the liquid collected in the tubes. The spray head of
4 FIG. 5 is seen to provide the most uniform distribution of liquid across the width of
5 the spray pattern.

6 In addition to using various forms of mechanical parts in such spray heads to
7 vary the flow from them, it is also well known in the art that an assortment of fluid
8 oscillating devices which have no moving parts in spray heads can be used to provide
9 a wide range of fluid droplet distributions. Such fluid oscillating devices are known
10 as fluidic oscillators and employ especially constructed fluid circuits or pathways to
11 cyclically deflect the flows from spray nozzles.

12 FIG. 7 from USPN 4,052,002 (Stouffer & Bray) and FIGS. 8A-8B from
13 USPN 4,151,955 (Stouffer) demonstrate some of the flow patterns that can be
14 achieved with various types of fluidic oscillators.

15 FIG. 7 shows what can be considered to be the essentially two-dimensional,
16 planar flow pattern (i.e., in the x-y plane of the oscillator) of a very small diameter,
17 essentially round jet of liquid that issues from the oscillator and then breaks into
18 droplets which are distributed transversely (i.e., in the y-direction) to the jet's
19 generally x-direction of flow. FIG. 8A shows a similar flow pattern. However, this
20 particular flow pattern owes its existence in large part to the specific geometry of this
21 oscillator, especially the distance between this oscillator's island and its outlet.

22 When this distance is not sufficiently large, the flow from this oscillator is
23 seen to take on a fully three dimensional flow pattern. See FIG. 8B. In this instance,
24 the flow from the oscillator no longer resembles that of a constant round jet whose
25 droplets are distributed in the x-y plane. Instead, the shape of the flow exiting the
26 oscillator is seen to change with time. Somewhat surprisingly, it is seen to have a
27 significant component in the z-plane, which is normal to the x-y plane of the
28 oscillator. The shape of the flow at the oscillator's outlet can be described as that of a
29 thin sheet of fluid in the z-x plane. However, the height (i.e., in the z-direction) of
30 this sheet varies as a function of time and is seen to cycle between instances in which

1 it has considerable height and other instances in which it contracts until its height is
2 such that it more closely resembles that of an approximate round jet.

3 FIG. 8B attempts to illustrate this three-dimensional flow pattern. The
4 varying height sheet of liquid (i.e., $h(t)$) from the oscillator is seen to be swept back
5 and forth in the x-y plane. The points where the sheet shrinks down to its minimum
6 height are denoted by the letters M in FIG. 8B. The resulting wetting pattern that is
7 produced on a downstream target surface is diamond-shaped. The diamond width W
8 is dependent upon the sweep angle in the x-y plane of the oscillator; the diamond
9 height H depends upon the maximum height of the sheet.

10 Even when the flows from fluidic oscillators are essentially two-dimensional,
11 as in FIGS. 7 and 8A, they can differ in another important aspect or characteristic as it
12 relates to their suitability for use in various spray head or showerhead applications.
13 This characteristic is the frequency with which the flows are being swept from side-
14 to-side.

15 The fluidic oscillator of FIG. 7 typically can be shaped so that its oscillating
16 frequency is in the range of that which can be sensed by human's tactile sensations (<
17 about 60 Hertz or cycles per second (cps)); thus this oscillator could be used to
18 provide one with a massaging sensation as the droplets impact on one's skin.
19 Meanwhile, the oscillator of FIG. 8A, for a wide range of its applicable geometries,
20 tends to exhibit three-dimensional flow patterns and oscillating frequencies that are
21 considerably above 60 hertz, which results in the pulsating nature of such a flow not
22 be discerned when it impacts on one's skin.

23 FIG. 9 from USPN 4,151,955 discloses a showerhead that employs a fluidic
24 oscillator that essentially combines two fluidic circuits of the types shown in FIGS 7
25 and 8A. For this application, the circuit of FIG. 8A is configured so as to yield a
26 three-dimensional flow pattern.

27 Despite much prior art relating to spray heads and showerheads or body spray
28 devices, there still exists a need for further technological improvements in this area.
29 For example, to get a uniform distribution of droplets over a relatively large surface
30 area (e.g., a 400 cm^2 area at a distance of 30 cm from the spray's exit), large
31 diameter, so called rain-maker shower heads are often used.

1 However, such rain-maker shower heads usually have many fine diameter
2 orifices that can become clogged and their resulting sprays are often characterized as:
3 (a) having low velocity (e.g., < or ~ 3 m/sec), small diameter (e.g., < 1.5 mm)
4 droplets which are inadequate for some bathing purposes (e.g., washing one's hair) if
5 such shower heads are operated within governmentally imposed flow rates (e.g., 2.5
6 gpm), and (b) being thermally inefficient because of the comparatively higher heat
7 losses experienced by small diameter, as opposed to large diameter, droplets in such
8 sprays. Unfortunately, there are no individual spray heads in today's marketplace
9 that can provide uniform coverage of large surface areas with large diameter (e.g., >
10 or ~ 2 mm), high velocity (e.g., > or ~ 4 m/sec) droplets.

11 Improved spray heads continue to be needed that can provide controllable
12 sprays of droplets that prove to be more efficient and effective in assorted
13 applications, such as by providing better performance or greater tactile pleasures in
14 many showerhead and body spray applications.

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17 **3. OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES**

18 There has been summarized above, rather broadly, the prior art that is related
19 to the present invention in order that the context of the present invention may be
20 better understood and appreciated. In this regard, it is instructive to also consider the
21 objects and advantages of the present invention.

22 It is an object of the present invention to provide an assortment of individual
23 spray heads with no moving parts and with relatively few orifices that uniformly
24 cover a relatively large surface area with liquid droplets that have average diameters,
25 velocities and possibly pulsating frequencies that meet a user's prescribed
26 specifications.

27 It is an object of the present invention to provide a spray head with no moving
28 parts and with relatively few orifices to uniformly cover a relatively large surface area
29 (e.g., a 400 cm² area at a distance of 30 cm from the spray head's exit) with liquid
30 droplets that have large diameters (e.g., > 2 mm), high velocities (e.g., > or ~ 4 m/sec)

1 and possibly pulsating frequencies that are in the range of perception by the human
2 body (e.g., < or ~ 30-60 hertz).

3 It is an object of the present invention to provide spray heads with no moving
4 parts and with relatively few orifices that are ideally designed for shower head and
5 body spray applications.

6 It is an object of the present invention to provide spray heads with no moving
7 parts and with relatively few orifices that operate at low flow rates in shower head
8 and body spray applications so as to yield significant water savings.

9 It is an object of the present invention to provide spray heads with no moving
10 parts and with relatively few orifices that are ideally designed for an assortment of
11 commercial cleaning applications.

12 It is an object of the present invention to provide spray heads with no moving
13 parts and with relatively few orifices for bathing applications that can allow for
14 reduced flow rates, while still yielding sprays that provide the same tactile sensations
15 as they impact upon the skin of a user.

16 It is an object of the present invention to provide spray heads with no moving
17 parts and with relatively few orifices for bathing applications that can allow for
18 reduced energy consumption, while still yielding sprays that provide the same tactile
19 sensations as they impact upon the skin of a user.

20 It is an object of the present invention to provide spray heads with no moving
21 parts and with relatively few orifices for bathing applications that can make “less
22 water” feel like “more water” (i.e., providing low flow rate sprays that provide the
23 same tactile sensations as they impact upon the skin of a user).

24 It is an object of the present invention to provide spray heads with no moving
25 parts and with relatively few orifices that prove to be ideally suited for shower
26 massaging applications.

27 It is an object of the present invention to provide spray heads with no moving
28 parts and with relatively few orifices that prove to be ideally suited for shower non-
29 massaging applications.

These and other objects and advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent as the invention is better understood by reference to the accompanying summary, drawings and the detailed description that follows.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Recognizing the need for the development of improved spray heads to more effectively and efficiently provide a wider range of desired spray distributions, the present invention is generally directed to satisfying the needs set forth above and overcoming the disadvantages identified with prior art devices and methods.

In accordance with the present invention, the foregoing need can be satisfied by providing a spray head that in a preferred embodiment includes the following elements: (a) a plurality of fluidic oscillators, each oscillator having a fluidic circuit embedded in its top surface, with this circuit forming a path in which a fluid may flow through the oscillator, wherein these oscillators are stacked one on top of the other, with the sides of the oscillators being configured so that they stack such that the flow of fluid from adjoining oscillators in the stack have an angle of divergence between the centerlines of the planes defined by the flows from the outlets of the adjoining oscillators that is in the range of 2 – 5 degrees, (b) a plurality of cover plates, with each cover plate being proximate the top surface of one of the fluidic oscillators and attached to the oscillator so as to provide a seal against the flow of fluid from the oscillator's fluidic circuit, (c) a carrier assembly having a front and a rear surface and a cavity extending between these surfaces, with this cavity being configured so to receive and hold the stack of fluidic oscillators in the spray head, and (d) a stopper unit that attaches to the assembly's rear surface and seals it against the flow of fluid from the assembly's rear surface.

1 In another preferred embodiment, the present invention takes the form of a
2 method for forming a fluid spray whose droplets cover a specified surface area
3 having a prescribed width and height, with this area located at a prescribed distance
4 in front of the spray head which emits the spray. This method includes the steps of:
5 (a) stacking a plurality of fluidic oscillators one on top of the other, each of these
6 oscillators having a prescribed fan angle in its front surface from which fluid is
7 emitted from the oscillator, (b) configuring the oscillators in this stack such that the
8 flow of fluid from adjoining oscillators have a specified angle of divergence between
9 the centerlines of the planes defined by the flows from the outlets of the adjoining
10 oscillators, (c) selecting the fan angles of the oscillators so as to yield the prescribed
11 spray width, and (d) selecting the specified angle of divergence and the number of
12 fluidic oscillators in the stack so as to yield the prescribed spray height.

13 In another preferred embodiment, the present invention takes the form of a
14 method for providing a fluid spray at a flow rate in the range of approximately 1.2 –
15 1.9 gpm that yields massaging, tactile sensations, as the droplets of said spray impact
16 upon the skin of one in the line of flight of said spray, which are comparable to those
17 produced by non-fluidic generated sprays operating in the higher flow rate range of
18 approximately 2.0 - 2.5 gpm. This method includes the steps of: (a) stacking a
19 plurality of fluidic oscillators one on top of the other, each of these oscillators
20 emitting an effective string of fluid droplets that are swept from side-to-side at a
21 prescribed frequency, (b) configuring the oscillators in this stack such that the flow of
22 fluid from adjoining oscillators have a specified angle of divergence between the
23 centerlines of the planes defined by the flows from the outlets of the adjoining
24 oscillators, and (c) selecting the prescribed frequencies of the oscillators to be in the
25 range between 10 cps and 60 cps.

26 Thus, there has been summarized above, rather broadly, the present invention
27 in order that the detailed description that follows may be better understood and
28 appreciated. There are, of course, additional features of the invention that will be
29 described hereinafter and which will form the subject matter of any eventual claims
30 to this invention.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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FIG. 1 illustrates the prior art, oscillating spray head disclosed in USPN 4,944,457.

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FIGS. 2A-2B illustrate the prior art, spray head disclosed in USPN 5,577,664, where FIG. 2B shows the sectional view taken along the line 3-3 of FIG. 2A.

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FIG. 3 illustrates the prior art, spray head disclosed in USPN 3,691,584.

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FIG. 4 illustrates the prior art, spray head which has a wobbling feature and is disclosed in USPN 6,360,964.

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FIG. 5 illustrates the spray flow pattern that is yielded by the spray head shown in FIG. 4.

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FIGS. 6A-6D compare the spray uniformity over a specified coverage area between competitive spray heads, with that shown in FIG. 6D being the spray from the head shown in FIG. 4.

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FIG. 7 illustrates the two-dimensional, planar spray flow pattern yielded by the fluidic oscillator disclosed in USPN 4,052,002.

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FIG. 8A illustrates the two-dimensional, planar spray flow pattern yielded by an appropriately configured fluidic oscillator as disclosed in USPN 4,151,955.

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FIG. 8B illustrates the three-dimensional, spray flow pattern yielded by an appropriately configured fluidic oscillator as disclosed in USPN 4,151,955.

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FIG. 9 illustrates a shower head that is disclosed in USPN 4,151,955 and which employs a fluid oscillator that is generally a combination of the oscillators shown in FIGS 7 and 8A.

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FIG. 10 shows the top view of the typical, two-dimensional distribution over a prescribed fan angle (e.g., 60 degrees) of spray droplets exiting a fluidic oscillator.

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FIG. 11 illustrates the three-dimensional distribution of spray droplets that can be attained by stacking fluidic oscillators according to the present invention.

1 FIG. 12 shows a stack of especially constructed fluidic oscillators which are
2 capable of achieving the spray distribution shown in FIG. 11.

3 FIG. 13 which shows an exploded view of a stack, according to the present
4 invention, of six such fluidic oscillators.

5 FIG. 14 shows a preferred embodiment of a fluidic oscillator that is suitable
6 for use with the present invention.

7 FIG. 15A shows a preferred embodiment of the carrier assembly of the
8 present invention.

9 FIG. 15B shows another preferred embodiment of the carrier assembly of the
10 present invention.

11 FIG. 16 shows an exploded view of a preferred embodiment of the present
12 invention as it is fitted into a housing which is suitable for use as a spray head.

13 FIG. 17 shows a cross-sectional view of the assembled parts shown in FIG.
14 16.

15 FIG. 18 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of
16 the fluidic oscillator disclosed in USPN 5,860,603.

17 FIG. 19 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of
18 the fluidic oscillator disclosed in USPN 6,253,782.

19 FIG. 20 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of
20 the fluidic oscillator disclosed in USPN 4,151,955.

21 FIG. 21 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of
22 the fluidic oscillator disclosed in a PATENT PENDING patent application of the
23 assignee.

24 FIG. 22 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of
25 the fluidic oscillator disclosed in USPN 6,253,782.

26 FIG. 23 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of
27 the fluidic oscillator disclosed in USPN 6,253,782.

28 FIG. 24 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of
29 the fluidic oscillator disclosed in USPN 3,563,462.

1 FIG. 25 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of
2 the fluidic oscillator disclosed in USPN PATENT PENDING patent application of
3 the assignee.

4 FIG. 26 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of a
5 currently under-development fluidic oscillator.

6 FIG. 27 shows a perspective view and gives the operating characteristics of a
7 currently under-development fluidic oscillator.

8 FIGS. 28A –28B illustrate the flow rate savings available for bathing
9 applications when using an oscillating spray having a frequency > 30 hertz.

10 FIG. 29 shows a perspective view of a preferred embodiment of the present
11 invention.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

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21 Before explaining at least one embodiment of the present invention in detail,
22 it is to be understood that the invention is not limited in its application to the details
23 of construction and to the arrangements of the components set forth in the following
24 description or illustrated in the drawings. The invention is capable of other
25 embodiments and of being practiced and carried out in various ways. Also, it is to be
26 understood that the phraseology and terminology employed herein are for the purpose
27 of description and should not be regarded as limiting.

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29 We have discovered that, by judiciously combining various fluidic oscillators,
30 spray heads can be developed which meet all of the previously listed objects for
improved spray heads. After much experimentation with various fluidic oscillators,
31 we have overcome the technical problems associated with combining the typical two-

1 dimensional, planar flows from single oscillators so as to yield fully three-
2 dimensional spray patterns that provide uniform spray droplet coverage over a large
3 surface area. Meanwhile, we have been able to overcome the problems associated
4 with interference between sprays that are coming from oscillators held in close
5 proximity to one another.

6 FIG. 10 shows the top view of a typical side-to-side, two-dimensional
7 distribution over a prescribed fan angle (e.g., 60 degrees) of spray droplets exiting a
8 fluidic oscillator. We have discovered, for a prescribed range of flow rates and
9 operating pressures, that such planar sprays can be brought in close proximity to one
10 another, so as to yield spatially uniformly distributed spray droplets with minimal
11 droplet interference, if the angle of divergence between the planes of the sprays of the
12 divergence angle of the stack is held within a critical range.

13 FIG. 11 illustrates the three-dimensional distribution of spray droplets that can
14 be attained by stacking fluidic oscillators which individually yield flow patterns
15 similar to that shown in FIG. 10. According to the present invention, FIG. 12 shows
16 a stack of especially constructed fluidic oscillators 10 which are capable of achieving
17 the spray distribution shown in FIG. 11. More details of this stacking arrangement
18 are seen in FIG. 13 which shows an exploded view of a stack of six such fluidic
19 oscillators.

20 FIG. 14 shows a preferred embodiment for a fluidic oscillator 10 that is
21 suitable for use with the present invention. It includes a substantially rigid body
22 member 12 having top 14, bottom 16, side 18a, 18b, front 20 and rear 22 outer
23 surfaces. This member is preferably molded or fabricated from plastic, which is
24 slightly deformable when subjected to compression forces exerted substantially
25 normal to its outer surfaces. A fluidic circuit 24 is fabricated into the top outer
26 surface. This circuit 24 takes the form of flow passage that is recessed from the top
27 surface and molded into the member 12 so as to yield a predetermined flow path for
28 the fluid flowing through the oscillator.

29 There are many different and well known designs of fluidic circuits that are
30 suitable for use with the fluidic oscillators of the present invention. Many of these
31 have some common features, including: an entrance 26 for flow to enter the circuit at

1 least one power nozzle 28 configured to accelerate the movement of the liquid that
2 flows under pressure through the oscillator, an interaction chamber 30 through which
3 the liquid flows and in which the fluid flow phenomena is initiated that will
4 eventually lead to the flow from the oscillator being of an oscillating nature, and an
5 outlet 32 from which the liquid exits the oscillator. Additionally, this oscillator has a
6 slot 34 which lies in the floor of the circuit and prior to its outlet 32. Such slots 34
7 have been found to increase the resulting fan angle and stability of the spray from
8 such oscillators. See USPN 5,971,301 for a further discussion of this particular
9 fluidic oscillator.

10 The fluidic oscillator of FIG.14 uses a cover plate 36 to close the top of the
11 fluid circuit and the body member. The use of such cover plates 36, commonly
12 known as "fliptops," is generally disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,845,845.

13 For the present application, it was discovered that it is beneficial to fabricate
14 such oscillators so that they are wedge shaped, with the height of their sides
15 increasing from the rear to the front of the oscillator. This results in the adjoining
16 oscillators, in a stack of them, having an included angle of divergence, ϕ . It is this
17 angle of divergence which is critical in achieving minimal spray droplet interference,
18 while also allowing close proximity of the adjoining planes of droplets so that the
19 impact of the individual planes cannot be felt as the droplets impact upon one who is
20 in their line of flight.

21 Since these oscillators will be stacked, they are also provided with protrusions
22 38 in their sides and wells 40 in their cover plates which promote the easy stacking of
23 such oscillators.

24 To accommodate such especially designed stacks of fluidic oscillators in the
25 housings that have become the conventional standard for spray head designs in the
26 plumbing industry, it has been found that it is advantageous to fit such stacks of
27 fluidic oscillators into a carrier assembly 42 which fits easily into any of the standard
28 shapes for conventional spray heads. FIG. 15A demonstrates the placement of such a
29 stack in an appropriately designed carrier assembly 42. A stopper unit 44 is seen to
30 be used to ensure a tight seal around the line where the rear surfaces of the individual
31 fluidic oscillators meet the bottom of the cavity 46 in the carrier assembly 42. A

1 carrier assembly cover plate 43 is used to hold the fluidic oscillators 10 in place
2 within the assembly.

3 The present invention is intended to be fitted into a housing 48 which is
4 suitably configured so that it can be sued as a conventional spray head. See FIG. 16.
5 This exploded view shows that this housing 48 having a cavity 50 into which the
6 carrier assembly 42 is fitted. FIG. 17 shows an assembled view of this combination.

7 In addition to configuring the body members of fluidic oscillators so that they
8 are wedge shaped and can be easily stacked so as to yield adjoining sprays with an
9 adequate angle of divergence, ϕ , it is possible to use standard shaped fluidic
10 oscillators and configure the carrier assembly 42 so that it has appropriately sized,
11 spaced and angled (i.e., with the required angle of divergence, ϕ) slots 47 in the
12 carrier's front surface 49 to accommodate the oscillators. In such a configuration, the
13 fluidic oscillators may not use cover plates 36. See FIG. 15B.

14 To further demonstrate how the discoveries of the present invention can be
15 used to design a desired distribution of spray droplets, consider the following
16 example. Suppose that it is desired to uniformly cover a surface area having
17 dimensions of 35 cm x 12 cm and which is located at a distance of 30 cm in front of a
18 spray head. Further, assume that the coverage is to be with droplets having a mean
19 diameter of approximately 2 mm and an average velocity of approximately 4 m/sec.
20 This is to be accomplished with a spray head operating at 1.6 gpm at approximately
21 10 psi and having fewer than 10 orifices so as to make these orifices large enough to
22 minimize the possibility that they will become clogged .

23 Until the teachings of the present invention, this task would have been
24 virtually impossible since the known spray devices that could cover the targeted area
25 cannot do so uniformly with droplets of the desired size and velocity. However, we
26 have discovered that the above requirements can be met by assembling a stack of six
27 fluidic oscillators such as that shown in FIG. 14 (with the individual oscillators sized
28 so that they each have an orifice area of approximately 2.6 mm^2) if the angle of
29 divergence, ϕ , between the individual oscillators is held in the range of approximately
30 2 – 5 degrees, with a preferred setting being 3.8 degrees.

1 In this stacked arrangement, such fluidic oscillators are observed to oscillate
2 at a frequency of approximately 50 hertz and with the wavelength of these
3 oscillations being approximately 10 cm. The result is a large area spray that to the
4 human touch has very pleasing, vigorous (because of the relatively high velocity and
5 large diameter of the droplets) massaging qualities.

6 Furthermore, this spray is achieved at surprisingly low flow rates (i.e., ranges
7 of 1.2 - 1.9 gpm versus non-fluidic, spray heads operating in the range of 2.0 - 2.5
8 gpm) as compared to those used by the currently available, non-fluidic, massaging
9 spray heads which cover significantly smaller surface areas.

10 While the above discussion has centered on our discoveries with respect to
11 stacks of specialized fluidic oscillators, it should be noted that we have also been able
12 to develop some specialized, individual fluidic oscillators that can provide side-to-
13 side sweeping sprays which cover relatively large areas. For various bathing
14 applications, the keys to making such oscillators perform so as to give desirable
15 tactile sensations to their users is to configure the circuits of such oscillators so that
16 their sweeping frequencies are in the range of 10 – 60 hertz.

17 With a wide range of fluidic circuits from which to chose and with many of
18 these offering quite different flow characteristics, it would appear that there exists an
19 almost infinite number of especially designed spray droplet distributions that can be
20 achieved by judiciously stacking currently available fluidic oscillators. To assist in
21 guiding such development tasks, FIGS. 18-27 disclose various, commercially
22 available (Bowles Fluidics Corporation, Columbia, MD) fluidic circuits that are
23 available for special spray head design needs.

24 Also shown on FIGS. 18-27 is data regarding the size and operating
25 characteristics of these oscillators. Additionally, it should be noted that the fluidic
26 circuits revealed in FIGS. 19, 21, 23, 24 and 27 provide flows having essentially two-
27 dimensional flow patterns, while the fluidic circuits shown in FIGS. 16, 20, 22, 25
28 and 26 (note: this circuit yields a special type of swirling jet) provide flows having
29 essentially three-dimensional flow patterns.

30 This data may be used to design a wide variety of spray heads having unique
31 spray droplet distributions. All of these design are considered to come within the

1 bounds of the invention disclosed herein. For example, to design a spray head to
2 uniformly cover a desired spray area (e.g., vertical = 34.5 cm x horizontal = 16 cm at
3 30 cm from the spray head) one can see by simple geometry that a vertically oriented
4 oscillator with a fan angle of 60 degrees will give the desired vertical coverage.
5 Furthermore, assuming the side of the oscillator is made with an angle of divergence,
6 ϕ , of 3.8 degrees, simple geometry will again show that a stack of approximately
7 eight such 60 degree fan angle oscillators will give the desired coverage. To obtain
8 desired other properties for such a spray (e.g., flow rate, average droplet size and
9 velocity, a desired pulsation frequency), choices will have to be made among the
10 various 60 degree fan angle oscillators according to their specified operating
11 characteristics.

12 As previously mentioned, for bathing purposes, significant flow rate
13 reductions and energy savings are possible using spray heads equipped with
14 especially designed stacks of fluidic oscillators. The reasoning behind this statement
15 is further clarified by FIGS. 28A-28B. In FIG. 28A, a Y-connector is shown which
16 splits a 2.5 gpm stream into two 1.25 gpm sprays or jets. Suppose that these two jet
17 sprays simultaneously impinge the skin of a bather at points A and B so as to produce
18 some feeling of their presence (e.g., pressure and temperature changes on the skin).
19 Meanwhile, FIG. 28B shows a 1.25 gpm jet being swept to and fro by a fluidic
20 oscillator.

21 As previously noted, as long as the frequency of the oscillation is well below
22 the maximum of human tactal perception (about 30-60 Hz), the alternate arrival of
23 the single jet at two different points, A and B, is interpreted by a human's tactile
24 senses as arriving at different times. But when the frequency of oscillation is
25 increased to this range and above this maximum, the jets are perceived as arriving at
26 A and B at the same time. In other words the single sweeping jet feels much the
27 same as the dual jets of the Y-connector. A water saving is inherently achieved since
28 the sweeping, single jet has half of the flow of the dual jet.

29 Additionally, it can be noted that a bather using a spray head which employs
30 such fluidic oscillators operating at > 60 hertz (i.e., non-massaging to human tactile
31 perceptions) will experience the feeling that a lot more water is passing through such

1 a spray head when it is operating within the statutorily limited upper flow rate of 2.5
2 gpm. For such a bather, "less water feels like more." Since many bathers are
3 reported to enjoy and prefer higher spray head flow rates, spray heads using fluidic
4 oscillators in the manner disclosed herein would appear to have a significant
5 advantage in the marketplace. This advantage is also complimented by the higher
6 degree of control for selecting droplet size, velocity and distribution that can be
7 engineered to spray heads which utilize fluidic oscillators as disclosed herein.

8 Meanwhile, the operating characteristics of fluidic oscillators, depending of
9 the fluidic's design, can be made to occur at very precise set points within what are
10 exceedingly large ranges of possible set points. In addition to operating parameters
11 such as mean droplet size and velocity, average pulsation frequency, and the spray's
12 lateral fan angle, fluidic oscillator's can also be shaped to provide a vertical fan angle
13 and to control the nature of the oscillator's pulsations (e.g., as represented by a square
14 wave which gives a heavier flow at the spray's extreme points of coverage, or a
15 triangular wave which gives a more uniform distribution of drops over the whole
16 coverage area). Additionally, as previously mentioned, the heating and perceivable
17 wetting characteristics of such sprays are very dependent on the size of the droplets
18 which comprise the sprays. Thus, a fluidic oscillator's ability to control droplet sizes
19 also allows fluidic oscillators to be especially useful when control of a spray's heat
20 transfer characteristics are a major design consideration.

21 To provide maximum design flexibility in the design of a spray head using a
22 stack of fluidic oscillators, it should be recognized that the oscillators in the stack
23 need not be all of the same kind. For example, oscillators with differing fan angles,
24 oscillation frequencies, droplet sizes and velocities can be stacked together to yield an
25 almost infinite number of sprays. All of these combinations are considered to be
26 within the teachings of the present invention.

27 Additionally, it can be noted that one can design a spray head such that it has
28 both conventional capabilities and those available by using fluidic oscillators into
29 single spray head. See FIG. 29 where a spray head is shown that utilizes an array of
30 fluidic oscillators in the center of the front surface of the spray head, with this array
31 being surrounding by a ring 52 of orifices 54 that emit a conventional spray.

1 The foregoing is considered as illustrative only of the principles of the
2 invention. Further, since numerous modifications and changes will readily occur to
3 those skilled in the art, and because of the wide extent of the teachings disclosed
4 herein, the foregoing disclosure should not be considered to limit the invention to the
5 exact construction and operation shown and described herein. Accordingly, all
6 suitable modifications and equivalents of the present disclosure may be resorted to
7 and still considered to fall within the scope of the invention as hereinafter set forth in
8 the claims.

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